

SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
BJ's Restaurant
990 N. Center Street
Gaylord, Michigan
January 24, 2006

Chairman Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 10:52 a.m., Tuesday, January 24, 2006 in Gaylord, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Grand Rapids
James Duke, Region I, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Munising
Bill Lucas, Region II, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Cadillac
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington

Members Absent:

Elza Inman, Grant Sponsors, Brethren

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Randy Charles, USDA, Ottawa National Forest

Staff Present:

Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Forest, Mineral & Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Steve Kubisiak, Recreation and Trails Program Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Manager, FMFM, Lansing
Bill O'Neill, FMFM, Gaylord
Michelle Wiegand, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Cadillac

The Snowmobile Advisory Committee, the Department of Natural Resources (Department) staff and the audience introduced themselves. **Mr. Manson** welcomed everyone.

MINUTES

The minutes of the December 8, 2005 Snowmobile Advisory Committee Meeting was acknowledged.

Motion by Mr. Duke to accept the minutes of the December 8, 2005 meeting, seconded by Mr. Murray. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

No committee reports.

OLD BUSINESS

Fuel Reimbursement – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported the 2005-06 season base grooming rate was adjusted to account for the average fuel cost increase since December 2004. It was based on the average fuel cost reports for the Midwest between December 2004 and 2005. The new reimbursement rate is \$4.34 per mile, effective December 1, 2005 until March 31, 2006. Sponsors

were notified by letter on December 19th. **Mr. Manson** reminded grant sponsors of the importance of recording their time and costs associated with the grooming program on the green sheets, so this information can be considered when making future adjustments to the grooming rates.

Lease Reimbursement – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported on changes to the lease reimbursement procedures. An advance payment of 90% will be made to trail sponsors upon written request and submission of the reimbursement request form. A final payment of 10% will be made to the trail sponsor upon submission of a reimbursement request form along with payment documentation. Sponsors were notified by letter on December 19th. **Mr. Radabaugh** reported some sponsors are requesting lease reimbursements that are higher than the established rates and noted the rates can not be raised at the discretion of the sponsor. The maximum allowable rate for property lease payments is \$300 per mile, payable at \$75 per quarter mile. **Mr. Lucas** said the \$75 rate would also apply to land parcels less than a quarter mile in length.

Emergency Response Signs – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported he discussed the SAC's recommendation with the Management Team and they thought the intent and general concept was good. He noted there was some concern regarding the text referencing the Department of Natural Resources on one of the signs and he will be seeking legal clarification. **Mr. Lucas** clarified that the text would not be on the sign but would be printed on the local trail maps produced by the clubs. **Mr. Radabaugh** asked who would be responsible for mapping and suggested it would be good to provide copies to the Department. **Mr. Manson** said it would be the clubs responsibility to do the mapping and post the signs in cooperation with local 911 dispatchers. He said the Forest Service will not allow an emergency sign to be posted on federal lands until a standard is established and that is why the SAC is looking for the Department's endorsement. **Mr. Charles** said that consistency is important and noted that signs must conform to Forest Service sign standards. The Forest Service does not have a standard for emergency locator signs.

NEW BUSINESS

Grant Reimbursement – **Mr. Jim Clendening, Rosco-Higgins Trail Cruisers** addressed the SAC regarding payment issues related to their grant. He said his payment request for grooming was delayed by the Department and their club needed that money in order to pay for snowplowing. He said his payment request for snowplowing was denied and would like the Department to reconsider his request. **Mr. Murray** said the Department should be flexible to address unusual circumstances. **Mr. Manson** said he believes this is a reasonable request, but noted it is important for the sponsors to adhere to reimbursement deadlines. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the club should follow up on these grant issues with their field contact and not wait for a SAC meeting to attempt clarification. He noted that the grant is closed. Staff will follow-up with Grants Management to review the chronology of events related to the reimbursement submittals and advise the club whether or not their request to be reimbursed for snowplowing can be considered.

Staff Follow-up to Questions Raised at the December Meeting:

Republic to Humboldt Acquisition Update – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported that it was his decision to use snowmobile funds for this acquisition and noted the decision was made in consultation with Mr. Manson. **Mr. Manson** said he is concerned with the way the press release was worded focusing on non-motorized trail use. He said that he became aware of the Department's decision to use snowmobile dollars after the fact, and he does not support the use of snowmobile funds for major trail acquisitions. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the corridor had strong non-motorized interests and use of snowmobile funds for the acquisition assured snowmobiling would be a permitted use. This is only the second corridor to be purchased with snowmobile dollars. The vast majority of major trail acquisitions are funded from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.

Supplemental Appropriation for Trail Acquisition Update – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported there were

questions related to the Department's ability to write a grant to the Snow Country Trails for the purposes of acquiring permanent rights in lands for snowmobile trail purposes. A formal request to the Attorney General's Office was not made, but subsequent discussion with Department legal staff indicate this is a possibility. The Department expects to have a final answer within the next couple of weeks. **Mr. Manson** said that the Non-profit is set-up and he is working on the insurance. He said the White Pine Company will manage the easements and offered to facilitate a meeting with the Department.

Permission to Use State Land Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported that if clubs wish to use state trails for an event, they must obtain a permit if it involves 20 or more people, or if a fee or donation is collected. He said if in doubt submit a permit application. If upon review it is determined that an event permit is not required a letter will be sent to the club. There is a \$50 non-refundable event permit application fee. **Mr. Manson** cited examples when events start and end off state land and situations where the trail system may not be used. He said he does not agree with this policy and believes that snowmobilers have already paid to use the trails through the purchase of their trail permit. **Mr. O'Neill** cited examples of large events that can impact natural resources and public use of state lands, and the need to manage these activities. **Mr. Murray** asked if the public was involved in the development of the new policy. **Mr. Radabaugh** noted interest groups were notified and public meetings were conducted.

Mr. Murray made a motion to strongly oppose the new policy as written, as it relates to snowmobile trails, seconded by Mr. Lucas. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. Radabaugh offered to facilitate a meeting with Mr. Manson and Dave Spalding to further discuss this issue.

Snowmobile Loop Trail Review Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported that at the direction of the District Supervisor, staff at the Atlanta Management Unit has begun evaluating loop type snowmobile trails to assess environmental impacts and determine if some trails should be closed. The Atlanta Management Unit is one of the remaining offices that groom trails. The Atlanta trail system is extensive and the Department has limited staff to perform grooming. It was the consensus of the SAC to oppose trail closures. They believe loop trails help to disperse use. **Mr. Radabaugh** said proposals to close trails would be carefully reviewed through the trail proposal process. **Mr. Radabaugh** is working with the Field Coordinators to develop a phase-out plan for statewide Department grooming operations. **Mr. Manson** said he would like to be involved in those discussions.

Failure to Perform Issue Update – Mr. Radabaugh is reviewing procedures with the Field Coordinators and will be providing guidance to the Unit Managers. Procedures will be clarified in the handbook. He is investigating the appropriateness of the two notices that were sent out earlier this season and will keep the SAC informed.

Sign Replacement Update – A follow-up letter will be sent to the clubs regarding sign replacement costs. This information will be provided to the purchasing office and considered when determining the final billing with the vendor. If clubs still have signs stockpiled that need to be picked up they should contact the sign contractor directly, as soon as possible. The Department will be soliciting bids for a new multi-year sign contract.

Memorandum of Understanding with the Forest Service Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported the Department has completed its review of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Natural Resources and the U. S. Forest Service regarding snowmobile trails. It has been returned to the U. S. Forest Service for signature.

Groomer Representative on Snowmobile Advisory Committee Update – Letters have been sent to the clubs soliciting nominations of an individual to represent contact groomers on the Snowmobile

Advisory Committee.

Old M-65 Bridge Update – Mr. Radabaugh confirmed the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) intends to retain ownership of the Old M-65 Bridge but wants a maintenance agreement for the bridge deck. The Department will facilitate a meeting with stakeholders. **Mr. Manson** said he or Mr. Lucas would like to be involved in those discussions.

Chassel to Houghton Rail Grade Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported that letters have been sent to adjacent property owners requesting the removal of obstructions that have been determined to be encroaching on the rail grade. Because the grade is jointly owned by the Department and MDOT, the matter has been referred to the Office of the Attorney General (AG) for advice to determine which agency has the right to challenge the encroachment. **Mr. Radabaugh** will advise the SAC as to the date when the notice was sent to the AG. Discussion ensued.

Yuma to Copemish Lease Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported the Department is continuing negotiations with MDOT for a long term lease. The Department's Office of Lands and Facilities has requested MDOT to recognize the investment costs associated with bridge improvements and maintenance in the final determination of the lease price. These negotiations are important in terms of securing recreational use on the corridor and will have implications on future long-term lease agreements between the agencies. **Mr. Lucas** and **Mr. Manson** expressed a desire to move forward with bridge engineering and trail improvements. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the lease would need to be finalized before proceeding with engineering or improvements.

Posen to Rogers City Trail Update – Mr. Radabaugh reported that a meeting with the Attorney General, Homeland Security, Department staff and the quarry owner has been set. **Mr. Manson** asked to be kept informed.

Trail Map Advertising, Map Boxes and Club Recognition Signs – Mr. Lucas reported a club was requested to remove map boxes from the trails by their field contact because the maps contain advertising. He believes advertising on the map should not be an issue for the Department and that snowmobilers like it. He also said that trail sponsors would like to be recognized and asked if a sign with the sponsors name would be considered advertising. **Mr. Radabaugh** said he would discuss this issue with the Field Coordinators and Land Management staff to determine if a compromise can be reached.

Logging on Snowmobile Trails – Mr. Lucas reported that logging occurred on a snowmobile trail after December 1. **Mr. O'Neill** said that timber contracts have provisions to protect public trail use, but under certain circumstance winter logging and use of a trail may be necessary. Compartment reviews are open to the public and are an opportunity for the public to provide input. He noted the Recreation Specialists are involved in this process and encouraged the clubs to attend. The compartment review schedule is posted on the Department website. Clubs may also request to be placed on a mailing list by notifying their FMFM field contact.

Chocolay Township Public Meeting – Mr. Manson reported he attended a public hearing regarding a proposed ordinance. No action was taken. He noted that adjacent land owners are suing the Department because they believe the Department did not follow proper procedures when establishing the trail under the Michigan Trailways Act.

STAFF REPORTS

Ottawa National Forest – Mr. Charles reported that all three national forests are finalizing their forest plans and will be complete in early March. The Military Hill Snowmobile Bridge proposal is out for public comment. He encouraged interested parties to comment.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Mr. Don Carol, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club -- Inquired about Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) accident statistics and believes ORVs should not be allowed on snowmobile trails. He inquired about deadlines for field contacts. He believes forest roads are poorly maintained. He said snowmobile trails are being used by neighbors and hunters, and that the snowmobile program is paying the brunt of forest road maintenance.

Mr. Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones – said his request to purchase snow fence was denied and wants to know why. He would like to use contingency funds for this purchase. He said he could not complete a trail reroute because all of his special maintenance projects were not approved. He wants to know why his special maintenance projects were not all approved. **Mr. DeBrabander** will follow-up and advise Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers – reported problems with the color of pre-printed and electronic trail permits this season. He noted a change in event permit costs. **Mr. O'Neill** said costs are based on the amount of staff review and management time required and referenced the fee schedule.

Mr. Tom Kowslowski – asked for clarification on how to handle trade-ins when purchasing equipment and when the new guidelines will come out. **Mr. Manson** said if a groomer is traded in, the value of the equipment will come off the top of the new groomer cost and the 75/25 cost share will be based on the balance of the new groomer cost. The workgroup will be addressing equipment and the sponsors will be notified if there are changes.

Mr. Martin Cottle, Sault Ste Marie Snowmobile Association – asked if private land lease payments apply to city and school property. **Mr. Radabaugh** said city and school owned property is considered public land not eligible for private land lease payments. **Mr. Cottle** said he received special maintenance funds to move a power pole but thinks he can save money if the trail is rerouted onto the interstate highway right-of-way. **Bill Manson** suggested he work with his field contact and local MDOT to determine feasibility. **Mr. Cottle** expressed concern in the speed of response on the I-500 track trail proposal. **Mr. Radabaugh** said this sounds like a community route. **Mr. DeBrabander** will follow-up and advise Mr. Cottle. **Mr. Cottle** noted that the five counties on the east end of the Upper Peninsula are coordinating their emergency response systems.

Mr. John Houk, Presque Isle Sno-Trails – asked if all of the \$1.9 million for equipment replacement was spent. **Mr. Radabaugh** confirmed that all the funding was spent. **Mr. Houk** complained about delays in reimbursement payments over the holidays. He asked if staff can be assigned to process payments while staff is on vacation. He asked if sponsors were denied brushing payment and why the Recreation Specialists and field contacts do not attend the SAC meetings. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the brushing issue is still under review and that the Department is still under an Executive Order restricting travel including meetings. Necessary staff will attend meetings to address agenda items as needed.

Mr. Brad Potter, West Michigan Snowmobile Council – read a statement regarding insurance. **Mr. Manson** said insurance is an issue and will send a copy of Mr. Potter's letter to the Department for their files. **Mr. Potter** expressed concern that the Allegan County Sheriff just received their Law Enforcement grant and had questions regarding equipment disposal policy. **Mr. Murray** expressed concern with the late date at which the county received their executed grant. **Mr. Kubisiak** will follow-up with Grants Management and will advise Mr. Manson regarding Allegan County's grant and Department law enforcement equipment disposal policy.

Mr. George Zajac, Trail Riders – asked if there is funding available for trail clearing storm damage. **Mr. Manson** said that contingency funds may be used for trail clearing with pre-approval from his field contact.

Mr. Larry Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile Association inquired about the status of the trail proposal for trail #4 to #92. **Mr. O'Neill** said that if it is the same proposal that was denied through previous appeals the answer has not changed. **Mr. Marzean** said it is a new proposal. **Mr. O'Neill** will follow-up and suggested Mr. Marzean check with his field contact.

NEXT MEETING

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 18, 2006 at 10:30 a.m., at BJ's Restaurant & Catering, 990 N. Center Street, Gaylord, Michigan.

The meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

Public Present:

Don Carroll, Ogemaw Snowmobile Club	Jeff Persondek, Rosco-Higgins Trl Cruisers
Bud Martin, Ogemaw Snowmobile Club	Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones
Sid Hamill, Grand Traverse Snow Council	Allen Cottle, Sault Snow Assoc/EUP Snow Cncl
John Houk, P.I.S.T. & N.E. MI Council	Martin Cottle, Sault Snow Assoc/EUP Snow Cncl
Bradley Potter, Western MI Snow Council	Jim Dingman, Trailriders, Baldwin
Kaye L. Houk, Presque Isle Snow Trails	George Zajac, Trailriders, Baldwin
Rolland Rieger, P.I. Snow-Trails	Fran Coon, Trailriders, Baldwin
Bob Bobinac, Heart of the North Snow Council	Fred Coon, Trailriders, Baldwin
Bob Eller, Alpena Snowmobile Club	Tom Gallagher, St Helen Snowpackers
Larry J. Marzem, Alpena Snowmobile Club	Don Mraz, St Helen Snowpackers
Ray Compeau, Alpena Snowmobile Club	Dave Becker, St Helen Snowpackers
Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club	Jerry Janeski, Alpena Snowmobile Club
Dan White, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club	
Tom Kozlowski, Rosco-Higgins Trl Cruisers	
